



PLANNING YOUR CHILD'S SUMMER

April showers bring May flowers, goes the adage. But for parents, the onset of spring also brings a mounting concern over children's summer plans. With June rapidly approaching, many parents are beginning to think about summer childcare, while others are starting to plan for a family vacation. And if your children are older, you may be thinking about summer camp.

This article presents a few basic strategies that can help you clarify your options, make an informed choice and prepare effectively.

FINDING AND CHOOSING

Choosing quality childcare for the summer involves the same basic steps as choosing year-round care. Research and evaluate the resources that are available in your area – such as childcare centers, in-home caregivers, arrangements with friends, relatives or neighbors, and age-appropriate day camps and extended-day programs.

To narrow down your choices, start by making calls or visiting the possible sites. At the very least, get a good recommendation or two from trusted friends who have used the facilities you are considering. Since you cannot monitor a summer program before the summer begins, ask if you can visit your child during the program or stay a bit during the first session.

THE CAMP EXPERIENCE

If you plan to send your child to summer camp, remember to devote adequate time to searching and choosing. Consider what each camp offers, and strive to make a choice that is good both from your perspective and from your child's.

There are four basic types of summer camps: day programs, overnight camps, day programs with trips, and special needs. For each of these, you are likely to find camps that focus on particular specialties that might appeal to your child.

Information on available camps is available from multiple sources, such as the library, schools and churches, community centers, sports teams, and your local museum. An Internet search can provide excellent and abundant resources.

HITTING THE ROAD

If you are planning a family road trip, try to focus on the activities and experiences that will make it a fulfilling time for your child while minimizing the stress and chaos for you. Here are some tips:

- *Plan, plan, plan.* Get all the travel guides and maps you need. Plan your routes and schedules, with lots of room for stops, traffic and detours. Pack efficiently, so the items you need are easily accessible. List the things you need to do before you go – such as buying swim gear or washing summer clothes.

- *Health and safety first.* Make sure your car and seatbelts are in good working condition. List the emergency and safety items you are likely to need – such as a flashlight, jumper cables, a first-aid kit, sunscreen and extra drinking water. Make sure activities such as swimming and hiking are age appropriate, and that your children are properly supervised and equipped.
- *Keep your child engaged.* Nothing adds to vacation stress like the time-honored “Are we there yet?” and “I’m bored!” Make sure engaging activities are available from the moment you leave the driveway. CDs and other personal entertainment are excellent ways of passing the time on the road. So are well-planned non-competitive word games and map-reading games.

The outings you plan throughout the vacation should be appealing to you and your child. Kids of all ages love to play outside, have fun with animals, and have quality time with parents. These simple elements can be just as meaningful as more complex or exotic activities.

With the right planning and execution, summer vacation can easily be a rewarding, refreshing and memorable time for the entire family.

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